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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

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TAGS: KWBG PREL PTER PHUM IS
SUBJECT: IDF OPERATION IN NABLUS ON FEBRUARY 27

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. PA security sources reported February 27 that an undercover IDF unit opened fire at five Palestinians in Nablus. Four were arrested and one died of his wounds. According to PA security sources, three were al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades activists whom the PA had sought to include in the GoI amnesty program. A Nablus al-Aqsa activist told the press that after this operation, "the Brigades are no longer obliged to observe a cease-fire." End Summary.

UNDERCOVER IDF UNIT OPERATION IN NABLUS

¶2. (C) According to PA security sources, an undercover IDF unit entered the Makhfiya area of Nablus at 1005 local February 27 and opened fire on five Palestinians leaving the Military Intelligence (MI, "Istikhbarat") headquarters. One Palestinian was killed and four taken into custody. According to PA security sources, Israeli officials opened fire after one of the Palestinians pulled out a hand gun during the arrest. PA security sources said that additional IDF troops entered Nablus when the undercover unit departed.

ONE DEAD, ONE WOUNDED

¶3. (C) According to PA security sources, three were members of al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades: Ibrahim al-Msaymi from Balata refugee camp, Wa'al al-Msaymi from Balata refugee camp, and Yasir Salam. Ibrahim al-Msaymi died of his wounds, and his body was quickly returned to PA security officials, and Wa'al was wounded. Istikhbarat chief BG Majid al-Faraj said the other two, Ali Batarshah and Ibrahim al-Jibrini, are not known al-Aqsa members.

PA SOUGHT TO INCLUDE SUSPECTS IN FUGITIVE PROGRAM

¶4. (C) Al-Faraj said he believes Ibrahim al-Msaymi and Wa'al al-Msaymi were the operation's principal targets. He told Pol Specialist that the PA had asked to include both in the fugitives program, but the GoI did not agree. The PA nevertheless convinced them to sign pledges not to carry out attacks and to surrender to the MI headquarters where they remained on and off over three months. He said Yasir Salam had been accepted by Israel into the fugitives program. Faraj publicly blamed the GOI for undermining PA efforts to enforce security in Nablus and earn public confidence with this operation.

¶5. (C) PA security chiefs in Nablus, including Mukhabarat officers Abu Hadid and Abdullah Kamil and MI officer Mahmud Walwil, told Pol Specialist that this IDF operation could

have serious security consequences in the West Bank. On behalf of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Ahmad al-Ka'abi publicly denied the IDF claim that the five were planning an attack and announced that the Brigades in Nablus are no longer bound by a cease-fire.

INITIAL REACTION TO IDF OPERATION

¶6. (C) Roughly 12,000 Palestinians attended the funeral of Ibrahim al-Msaymi in the Balata refugee camp February 27. Sixteen armed gunmen were present at the funeral, but no security incidents occurred. PA security sources also report that four al-Aqsa Brigades members in Nablus' Juneid prison were injured February 27 after lighting their cell on fire to protest that they were not allowed to attend the funeral.

WALLES